ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE D5

THE BALTIMORE SUN
26 November 1978

The man from Clandestine Services

Sub Rosa: The C.I.A. and the Use of Intelligence. By Peer de Silva. 308 pages. Times/Quadrangle. $12.50.

This absorbing narrative, the professional memoirs of a high-ranking official of the Central Intelligence Agency, begins, and almost ends, with a bomb. In 1945 fate picked him as the Army officer to hand-deliver the plutonium sphere that obliterated Nagasaki. In 1965, while gazing idly out his office window in Saigon, where he was intelligence Chief of Station at the American Embassy, he was all but blown up by a Vietcong bomb. In between these murderous episodes the author has an intriguing story to tell. Its purpose is to fulfill the "need for a correct and honest picture of how the CIA does in fact work and operate abroad and at home."

Retired in 1973, he is not the first to do so, but his ultimate position as chief of Foreign Intelligence within the Clandestine Service gives his testimony a special authority. The late author, who died at his home in Virginia last spring while working at a history of the Manhattan Project, had become dismayed by "the flood of written and spoken material about the CIA [that] is characterized by distortion, inaccuracy, and plain ignorance." Its chief purveyors he ascertains "to be in academe and the media. I can find only two factors that seem to link these two disparate elements: they both consider themselves to be intellectually objective, and neither has any responsibility for dealing with the problems faced by the CIA."

In his varied foreign assignments Mr. de Silva's duties were very responsible indeed, and his accounts of them are blessed with an almost total absence of that impossibly recollected dialogue which throws such a spurious cast over so many modern-day autobiographies. In a very level tone, but rarely in a pedestrian style, the author takes us across Eastern and Central Europe, where half of his overseas duty fell, and then to the Far East, where the remainder lay. At all his posts he encountered situations and personalities the meshing of which tended to culminate in what most laymen would view as the very essence of glamor, sometimes of romance. How he and his staff successfully bugged a KGB installation. How he contrived to join the mob of Russians "spontaneously" trotting through Red Square on May Day, and learned the reason they were all instructed to keep their hands flapping in air was to minimize the threat of someone's taking a potshot at Party chiefs on the reviewing stand.

There are no deep revelations here — with the striking exception of a glimpse of Ambassador George Kennan requesting an "L pill" (poison) in case he should fall under Soviet duress while stationed in Moscow. There are, however, candid sketches of many of the celebrities in with whom the author was thrown, such as Secretary of Defense McNamara, whom de Silva found totally inept vis a vis the Vietnamese situation. For the author is far from uncritical of "the characteristics of the Americans. At home we endured political scandal, Joe McCarthy, and Communist influence in high places. Our homegrown faults were enormous, pervasive; only the wealth of our natural resources, our population, and our democratic initiatives had saved us from political extinction."

In sum, here is a valuable, informative social and political testament. De Silva is convinced that all the elaborate scientific devices for garnering intelligence will never completely replace the human agent. He hopes they never will. "There are tigers roaming the world, and we must recognize this or perish."

CURTIS CARROLL DAVIS.

Mr. Davis is a veteran of the CIA.